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FM AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7356
INFO RUEHAAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 2685
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA 8783
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 3279
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 3152
RUEAORC/US CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 000562

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN AND INL/AE
CBP FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING BRANCH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/04/2017

TAGS: SNAR PREL KCRM UZ

SUBJECT: ACCESS PROBLEMS NEARLY DERAIL INL-FUNDED TRAINING
IN TERMEZ

REF: A. TASHKENT 376

¶B. 06 TASHKENT 1251

Classified By: Amb. Jon R. Purnell for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) An INL-funded U.S. Customs team provided training for Uzbek Customs personnel at the Termez River Port and Sarosiya Rail Depot. The team was initially denied access to the border areas, and the project went forward only after visiting SCA Deputy Assistant Secretary Evan Feigenbaum raised the problem with the President's National Security Adviser. While the program ultimately was successful, its problems are indicative of our larger border security relationship with the Uzbeks. Working level counterparts are eager to cooperate with us, and senior people want to work with the United States if only because of the equipment that our programs provide. No one, however, is ready to intervene to solve bureaucratic problems and other difficulties without a direct sign from Tashkent. End summary.

¶2. (U) Post's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) program sponsored training February 28 - March 6 for Uzbek Customs officers assigned to the Surkhandaryo Province's Termez River Port and Sarosiya Rail Depot. In addition to training on general topics, such as terrorism awareness and common smuggling techniques, U.S. Customs and Border Protection trainers provided information on contraband enforcement techniques specific to rail and maritime operations. The trainers eventually were permitted to observe the unloading and inspection of cargo at both locations as well as passenger inspections at the rail depot.

Bureaucratic Snafus Abound

¶3. (C) The training, which had been approved by the Government of Uzbekistan two months in advance, almost ended before it began as the result of what Customs contacts described as a series of bureaucratic snafus and interagency rivalry. The problems began immediately upon arrival in Termez when U.S. personnel were delayed for 30 minutes at the airport for document checks by Border Guards because they were not on the list of foreigners approved for travel to Surkhandaryo Province on the day of arrival. The problems continued the next morning when the trainers arrived at

Surkhandaryo Regional Customs Headquarters for the first day of training. They discovered that Customs Headquarters in Tashkent had ordered all personnel not on duty to attend a meeting, lasting all day, to discuss President Karimov's latest anti-corruption speech and its applicability to Customs personnel. Trying to remain flexible, the U.S. team suggested they could make use of this time by visiting the river port. Unfortunately, this would not be possible, our Customs contact explained, as the Border Guards had yet to receive orders allowing the Americans access to the port. Going to the rail depot was out of the question for the same reason, he said. The American team spent the rest of the day sightseeing in Termez.

¶4. (C) Upon learning of the access problems, poloff made calls to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Border Guards. MFA blamed the Border Guards, saying that the letter granting access had been sent weeks beforehand. Border Guards blamed MFA, saying that such a letter had never been received. Neither apparently was willing to issue the necessary orders to break the logjam and grant the U.S. Customs team access to the border posts. Ultimately, it took a request for help from visiting SCA Deputy Assistant Secretary Evan Feigenbaum during a meeting with National

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Security Council Secretary Murod Ataev (ref A) for the difficulties to be resolved.

Termez River Port

¶5. (C) Once access to the port was granted, U.S. Customs personnel provided maritime contraband interdiction training to 11 Uzbek Customs officers assigned to the river port. These officers are responsible for inspecting cargo going to

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and from Afghanistan. Border Guard personnel closely watched U.S. personnel during their entire visit to the port and restricted their movements. However, the U.S. visitors were permitted to observe port employees unload about three rail cars of raisins from Afghanistan. Uzbek Customs officers claimed that they inspected 100 percent of the cargo imported from Afghanistan. It became clear that this claim was accurate only inasmuch as standing to the side and watching boxes being carried past can be considered an inspection. U.S. personnel noted that their Uzbek counterparts lacked basic equipment such as pliers, probes, and even flashlights. (Comment: The restrictions encountered during this training are in marked contrast to the DCM's September visit in which Embassy personnel were allowed to move freely about the port (ref B). The DCM's visit was arranged by the regional Border Guard headquarters, and he was accompanied by the Border Guard regional deputy commander, which might explain why the two teams were treated so differently. End comment.)

Sarosiya Rail Depot

¶6. (C) The training provided what is believed to be the first American access to the Sarosiya Rail Depot, located on the Uzbek-Tajik border. The depot, which is under construction, consists of two large two-story buildings occupied by Uzbek Customs and the state railroad company, several smaller support buildings, and a rail inspection yard. The rail yard was equipped with lights. According to Customs officials, the rail depot receives ten passenger trains each week: six operating between Moscow and Dushanbe and four that transit Uzbek territory while traveling between Dushanbe and other cities in Tajikistan. A similar number of cargo trains also transit the depot.

¶7. (C) U.S. personnel observed that Uzbek Customs and Border

Guard personnel line both sides of the tracks as passenger trains enter the depot to prevent anyone from leaving the train. Once stopped, officials enter the train and conduct document and customs checks. The entire procedure takes approximately two hours, and no passengers are allowed to leave the train during this period. Cargo trains are inspected in a similar fashion, with officials conducting an initial inspection to decide if the train will be allowed to continue or be held for secondary inspections. If held over, secondary inspections typically involve unloading entire rail cars by hand and can take several days. As with the river port, U.S. personnel noted that their Uzbek counterparts lacked even basic equipment. As but one example, emboffs watched Uzbek Customs personnel for over an hour as they pried open the doors of a rail car using crowbars as they did not have bolt cutters to break the door's security seals.

Comment

¶ 8. (C) Emboffs have previously heard the excuse that somebody forgot to inform the Border Guards, as this was purportedly the reason that another INL team was denied access to the river port and rail depot in April 2006 (ref B). Interagency rivalry may play some role, as access to border areas tends to go much more smoothly on trips organized by the Border Guards than those in which Customs is in charge. Regardless of the bureaucratic reasons for the problems, the visit was in many respects indicative of our overall border security relationship with the Uzbeks. At the working level, our counterparts are engaged and eager to cooperate. Even senior level officials appear willing to cooperate if only because they want the equipment our programs provide. No one, however, is willing to stick his own neck out and resolve bureaucratic and other difficulties that arise without a clear signal from Tashkent that it is okay to do so.

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